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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARTO 000013

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PREL, PGOV  
SUBJECT: (U) Secretary Rice's July 24, 2006 conversation  
with Lebanese Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri.

¶1. (U) Classified by: Arnold Chacon, Deputy Executive  
Secretary, S/ES, Department of State. Reason 1.4 (d).

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¶2. (U) July 24, 2006; 4:30 pm; Beirut, Lebanon.

¶3. (U) Participants:

U.S.  
The Secretary  
Amb. Jeffrey Feltman  
U/S Karen Hughes, R  
A/S David Welch, NEA  
Elliot Abrams, NSC  
¶Q. Gen. William M. Fraser III, Joint Chiefs of Staff  
Kurt Mihelich (Embassy Notetaker)

LEBANON  
Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri  
Foreign Affairs Adviser Ali Hamdan

¶4. (C/NF) SUMMARY. The Secretary offered Berri a  
proposal to end immediately the fighting in Lebanon to  
avoid a humanitarian crisis in the south. Rice proposed  
that a cease-fire take place under the conditions that  
Hizballah withdraw to north of the Litani River and an  
international force be deployed to provide humanitarian  
assistance and stabilization to the south. Once these  
conditions were met, then related issues such as  
implementation of UNSCR 1559 and the Taif Accords and  
resolution of territorial issues (including Shebaa Farms)  
could be addressed. Berri suggested that a quick prisoner  
exchange was the best way to achieve a cease-fire. Rice  
replied that Israel would not accept a prisoner exchange  
as grounds for a cease-fire, since the underlying  
conditions that led to the hostage-taking would remain.  
Berri said that he was not optimistic; he thought that  
Hizballah would reject the proposal. However, Berri  
promised he would try to sell the proposal to Hizballah.  
END SUMMARY.

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STABILITY IN SOUTH MUST COME FIRST  
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¶5. (C/NF) The Secretary stressed the importance of  
regaining stability in southern Lebanon as soon as  
possible to avoid a greater humanitarian crisis. There  
was the danger that internally displaced persons (IDPs)  
would never return to their homes unless there was a plan  
to bring stability to the area.

¶6. (C/NF) The Secretary added that, although the USG was

working with Israel to open humanitarian corridors in the south, a more comprehensive cease-fire plan must be achieved. To get the Israelis to take a cease-fire plan seriously, the elements should include the following: 1) all illegal armed elements, including Hizballah, must cease activity in the south and withdraw to north of the Litani River, and 2) an international stabilization force be quickly deployed to help UNIFIL and the LAF provide immediate humanitarian assistance and stabilization. UNIFIL would get a short-term roll-over. A more permanent force would then replace the international stabilization force. On this basis, the Secretary was prepared to ask Israel to cease its military operations.

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ISSUES CAN BE DISCUSSED POST CEASE-FIRE  
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¶17. (C/NF) The Secretary said that once a cease-fire and stabilization were achieved, then other issues such as full implementation of UNSCR 1559 and the Taif Accord and resolution of territorial issues including the Shebaa Farms dispute could be discussed. But Hizballah must withdraw to north of the Litani to make discussion of these issues possible. The Secretary said that if Syria cooperated, she believed that Israel would be open to discussing the status of the Shebaa Farms under the comprehensive plan detailed above.

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BERRI UNCERTAIN  
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¶18. (C/NF) Berri initially responded with his obligatory recitation of the impact of Israeli military operations, including briefly showing a binder of color, lurid, full-page photos of civilian casualties. Berri asserted that Hizballah thought it was winning the war, and used the bloody fighting at Maroun al-Ras as an example. In 13 days, Israel had not killed more than 18 Hizballah fighters, according to Berri. Other Arab states stood out against Israel for only six days; Hizballah was now going on two weeks. He proposed a quick exchange of prisoners to end the fighting. Berri claimed this could be accomplished within a week.

¶19. (C/NF) The Secretary said that a prisoner exchange at the current time was not possible. Israel would not accept it. The priority needed to be stabilizing the situation in the south and the cessation of all armed element activity. If stability could be achieved, then perhaps the IDPs would return quickly to their homes and avert a long-term humanitarian problem.

¶10. (C/NF) Berri said that the Secretary's proposal would be very difficult to sell to Hizballah. Hizballah would not agree to withdraw to the Litani, even if it meant more chaos and suffering in the south. Hizballah did not care about international pressure, either. Hizballah could only be pressured from within Lebanon, and a prisoner exchange was the only way to do it. Berri said that he was skeptical, but he promised the Secretary he would try to sell the proposal to Hizballah.

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COMMENT  
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¶11. (C/NF) Berri was reluctant to engage seriously on anything other than the idea of a prisoner exchange connected with a cease-fire, clearly a non-starter. PM Siniora told us that he had gone to see Berri after the Secretary's meeting concluded, in order to compare notes

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with him and to ensure that the Speaker understood that the Secretary was offering him a package deal with some

attractive elements for Lebanon. Siniora's opinion was that Berri had not ruled out the U.S. elements but worried that it would be difficult to get Hizballah on board, no matter how badly Hizballah was hit militarily.

RICE